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GUARANTEE OF CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING THROUGH DEVELOPMENT OF
AN EFFECTIVE FAMILY STRENGTHENING SYSTEM IN THE REPUBLIC OF
KAZAKHSTAN

A Thesis

Presented to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

By

Gulnaz B. Kelekeyeva

August 2013

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Gulnaz B. Kelekeyeva

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GUARANTEE OF CHILDREN’S WELL-BEING THROUGH
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ABSTRACT

GUARANTEE OF CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING THROUGH DEVELOPMENT OF AN EFFECTIVE FAMILY STRENGTHENING SYSTEM IN THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

By

Gulnaz B. Kelekeyeva

August 2013

Thesis supervised by Dr. Charles Hanna and Dr. Moni McIntyre

In 2012, 10,887 children resided in state-run residential care institutions in the Republic of Kazakhstan. Out of them, more than 80 percent were children whose parents were alive and known to the authorities, but who have been deprived of parental rights. Institutionalization negatively impacts children's health and development. These children are often subjected to violence, child trafficking, and most of them leave formal care without the skills needed to begin an independent life. The current report provides evidence and proof of the necessity for reforming the national child protection and family strengthening system so as it would be capable to adequately support the most vulnerable children and their families as well as to prevent family separation. The report provides an in-depth review and analysis of the latest data published by the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, international organizations and NGOs operating in the country.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Formal Care in the Republic of Kazakhstan

According to official data of the Committee on Child Protection (2012:39), there are 34,785 orphans and children deprived of parental care living in Kazakhstan. Out of these children, 10,887 have been placed in institutions (841 are brought up in institutions within the system of labor and social protection, 1,552 – health system, and 8,494 - education system). 21,736 children have been placed under guardianship and tutelage, and 2,162 are under foster care. Out of more than 10 thousand children residing in state run residential care institutions, more than 80 percent are children whose parents are alive and known to the authorities, but who have been deprived of their parental rights. The high number and rate of children in formal care indicates the inefficiency of the child protection and family strengthening system. The system does not support families in fulfilling their responsibilities to care for their children and prevent separation (Oxford Policy Management 2011:14).

Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, Independent Expert for the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children (2006:189), reports that institutionalization has negative effects and leads to “poor physical health, severe developmental delays, disability, and potentially irreversible psychological damage.” The longer a child remains in an institution, the more severe the negative effects. Children under the age of four residing in infants' homes are at a higher risk of having developmental delays when compared to older children, as they are deprived of parental care at an early age, and are neglected and lack attention of the institution staff.

Institutionalized children are more often subjected to violence when compared to children living in a family environment. As commented by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, “children deprived of family protection are the most common victims of the worst forms of mistreatment and abuse, and too often such abuse takes place either at the hands of state agents or is made possible by their approval, tolerance or neglect” (Hodgkin and Newell 2002:281). Robin N. Haarr (2011), UNICEF international consultant, revealed in her recent assessment that violence among children and against children by staff is a serious problem in state run residential care institutions of Kazakhstan.

Nearly 43% of children in shelters and 50% of children in orphanages and institutions for children with deviant behavior reported witnessing violence among children in the institutions. In addition, 40% of staff working in infants’ homes, 69% of staff in institutions for children with psycho-neurological and severe disabilities, and 80% of staff in special correctional institutions of education reported witnessing violence among children in the institutions. 26% of children in shelters, 35% in orphanages, and 41% in institutions for children with deviant behavior reported witnessing staff use of violence against children in institutions. In addition, nearly 22% of staff in infants’ homes, 51% of staff in institutions for children with psycho-neurological and severe disabilities, and 56% of staff in special correctional institutions of education reported witness staff use of violence against children in institutions. Moreover, 25% to 53% of staff supported the use of corporal punishment against children in institutions. (P. 74)

All children residing in institutions within the system of labor and social protection have permanent disabilities of bodily functions due to physical and/or mental factors. Moreover, as reported by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2013), 20 percent of children under the age of four brought up in infants’ homes are disabled. These children lack stimulation and attention during their stay in residential care. The institutions are located far away from the children’s families, so the children are limited in family contacts. Often, they are misdiagnosed, over-diagnosed, or over-

medicated. This leads to a sharp deterioration of their health status. Children with disabilities in the Republic of Kazakhstan are stigmatized, discriminated against, and lack adequate care and support, which they need for their growth, development, and further integration into society.

In Kazakhstan, more than 1,900 young people leave care every year, most of them without the skills or socialization needed to begin an independent life. Assiya Khairullina, SOS Children's Villages Kazakhstan National Consultant (2010), revealed that the majority of care leavers have not completed their education, having been expelled or having dropped out of school. There are several factors that hamper getting special secondary or high education: poor performance at school, difficulties in choosing a profession, low levels of self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, poverty, low motivation, poor health, and limited access to information and services (Kameda Research and Consulting Centre 2011:26-33). Expulsion from the public education system automatically deprives young people of critical state support and social protection, placing them at an even greater risk of social exclusion. Yet even those who complete special secondary education often find that employers are reluctant to employ care leavers because these young people lack work experience and are not motivated to work. While a few programs have been established to integrate care leavers in the work force in the context of corporate social responsibility, such efforts remain exceptional (Kameda Research and Consulting Centre 2011:26-33).

The official data reveal that no accommodation had been secured for nearly 93 per cent of institutionalized children. During the last seven years, only 756 apartments have been provided by the government for this category of children (Committee on Child

Protection 2012:42). This critical shortage persists despite legislation guaranteeing housing for young people ageing out of care and proscribing their dispossession. Even those care leavers who are able to return to their homes often face socially or economically challenging situations and often find themselves in need of substantial support.

The current study is about children at risk of losing parental care and their families. Despite recent reforms enacted by the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan within the national de-institutionalization program, which have led to an increase in the number of children being placed in alternative families, many children, in particular, children with disabilities, are still living in institutions. They live in formal care, which undermines their development potential. This report provides an in-depth review and analysis of the causes of children's separation from their families and factors leading to a family breakdown. It aims to increase the knowledge on the reach and effectiveness of the national social protection system for vulnerable children and families most at risk of separation. Finally, it offers a set of recommendations for strengthening the impact of current child and family protection policies, legislation, social assistance and services.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Objectives

In the previous chapter, I provided introductory information on the status of orphans and children deprived of parental care in the Republic of Kazakhstan. I supplied statistical data of the numbers of institutionalized children; discussed the negative impact of institutionalization on children's health and development; and analyzed the prevalence of violence among children and against children by staff within residential care institutions. I also examined the status of institutionalized children with disabilities, as well as the violation of rights of young people ageing out of care - their unpreparedness and vulnerability to the difficulties of independent life out of the bounds of residential care institutions.

Below, I provided evidence for the necessity of reforming the child protection and family strengthening system in the Republic of Kazakhstan. It is now capable of adequately supporting the most vulnerable children and their families or preventing family separation. First, I discussed the current situation of children and families at risk of separation in the Republic of Kazakhstan in order to describe the causes of children's separation from their families and factors leading to a family breakdown. Further, I evaluated the capacity of the existing family strengthening system in addressing the needs of vulnerable groups of children and families and preventing family breakdown based on the Social Protection Strategic Framework developed by the UNICEF Social and Economic Policy Analysis Unit (See Chapter 3). Examining of the system's key components allowed me to discover the pressing national issues and to determine the

most relevant approaches and potential interventions. Finally, I revised the list of services provided for the families at risk as per the National Standard on Provision of Special Social Services in the Sphere of Education # 526. During this process the internationally recognized methods and technologies of work with children and families (such as those recommended by UNICEF, Save the Children, and other leading international children's organizations) were studied and applied, taking into consideration the local context. Also, the set of recommendations on the general structure and key elements of the National Standard were elaborated.

2.2 Research Design and Data Collection Methods

The thesis has analyzed relevant existing documents and background information (data published by the government, international organizations, and NGOs) in order to get an insight on the status-quo of children and families at risk of separation in the Republic of Kazakhstan, as well as to determine the effectiveness of the family strengthening system. The knowledge-base helped to define what services the vulnerable groups of children and families are in acute need of and how it is possible to fill the gaps that exist in the current family strengthening system using the internationally recognized methods and technologies of work with children and families.

CHAPTER 3

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

On May 18, 2012, the UNICEF Social and Economic Policy Analysis Unit presented the Social Protection Strategic Framework, considered to be a new concept of social protection. UNICEF defines social protection as (Yablonski and Winder 2012):

Social protection is the set of public and private policies and programs aimed at preventing, reducing and eliminating economic and social vulnerabilities to poverty and deprivation. Social protection is essential to furthering UNICEF's commitment to the realization of the rights of children, women and families to an adequate standard of living and essential services. (P. 24)

The key components of the social protection system include the following: social transfers, programs to ensure access to services, social support and care services, and legislation and policy reform to ensure equity and non-discrimination. In order to provide effective support for children and families and to strengthen their resilience to poverty and social exclusion, the above-named components must be interlinked and the entire system must be holistic and well-coordinated. According to this Strategic Framework, UNICEF is redirecting national governments away from narrow child protection toward family support – a considerably large shift in global policy. Specifically, at the end of 2012 through the beginning of 2013, UNICEF started to advocate for and support governments in the strengthening of social protection systems through technical support, analysis, and policy dialogue.

This research is very timely and takes into account UNICEF's proposed agenda for future action in the sphere of social protection of children and families. In order to examine the effectiveness of the existing family strengthening system in Kazakhstan, I

will analyze its key components, based on the Strategic Framework proposed by UNICEF (Yablonski and Winder 2012:39).

The first component of the system is *social transfers* defined by UNICEF as the predictable direct transfers to individuals or households, both in-kind and in cash, to protect them from the impact of emergencies, support the accumulation of human, financial, and productive assets, and contribute to reduced economic and social vulnerabilities. Particularly, social transfers reduce household poverty and hunger; provide income, security and stability for poor families, thus strengthening their economic resilience and enabling them to provide better care for their children. There are different types of social transfers including the following: conditional/unconditional cash transfers, child allowances, school feeding programs, maternal and parental benefits, disability grants, cash for work, unemployment benefits, and housing allowances. When examining the effectiveness of the existing family strengthening system, questions that may arise include: Do the social assistance programs reach the targeted low-income families and children? How effective are they in alleviating child and family poverty?

The second component of the system is *programs to ensure access to social services*. These are social protection interventions that reduce economic and social barriers households face when accessing social services. One of the social protection instruments that enhances access to services and protects the rights is birth registration. Another social protection instrument that allows certain groups to access and use services, and contributes to the reduction of structural gaps between groups is the removal of user fees. Several important questions arise when examining the effectiveness of the system: Are vulnerable groups of families and children aware of existing social

services for which they are eligible? Do they know how to access them? What administrative barriers limit access to social services?

The third component of the system is *social support and care services*. This is a range of human resource-intensive services that help identify and reduce vulnerability and exclusion, particularly at the child and household level by strengthening individuals' and households' resilience, improving their capacity to overcome crisis situations and strains, and linking households to existing programs and services. There are two types of services – family support services and home-based care. Family support services are aimed to strengthen and preserve families, prevent family breakdown, and ensure early intervention in families at-risk. Home-based care is intended to support persons with disabilities or serious illnesses in their homes. When examining the effectiveness of the system the following important questions may arise: Do the existing social services effectively address all the problems that vulnerable groups of children and families encounter in their lives? What is the level of capacity of service-providers? Is the quality of social services monitored on a regular basis? How effective is the coordination between ministries at the national and local level? How developed is the non-profit sector?

The last component of the system is *legislation and policy reform to ensure equity and non-discrimination*. These are the changes to policies/legislation in order to remove inequalities in access to services or livelihoods/economic opportunities, protect families and support their role in childcare. The relevant questions that may arise are the following: Taking into account that much legislation on the rights of the child has been adopted recently, how effective is its practical implementation? How clear are the

implementation guidelines? How clear is the division of roles and responsibilities among key stakeholders involved in the implementation process?

CHAPTER 4

LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 General Trends and Gaps in the Literature and Research Limitations

A comprehensive overview of published research in the sphere of child protection and family strengthening in the Republic of Kazakhstan revealed some general trends and gaps in the literature and suggested limitations that should be taken into consideration for future research.

UNICEF in Kazakhstan is the only organization that assesses the situation of children, women, and families, and tracks progress through data collection and analysis. Non-profit organizations operating in Kazakhstan do infrequent investigations due to limited internal capacity or financial resources. As for official data collected and published by the government, the rates of different categories of vulnerable children and families are usually understated, their coverage by social assistance and services is overestimated, many facts are suppressed, and some existing social problems are not recognized by the government officials. For instance, there are scant data on the nature and prevalence of abuse, neglect and violence against children. This is partly due to the lack of clear reporting and responding mechanisms, including inadequate communication lines among service-providers (doctors, teachers, Departments on Child Protection, etc.), and unclear definition of roles and responsibilities of all people involved in the process. The government is trying to present its work as effective both at the national and international level so as to avoid social tension and to prove to international organizations such as the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child its conformity to the provisions of numerous previously ratified international treaties. The official reports on the status of

children and families in the Republic of Kazakhstan provide mostly quantitative data. The data focus on social assistance and services' coverage of the target group and the amount of budgetary expenditures for social programs.

Having moved from a system of centralized planning and management of public services, government officials are not equipped with knowledge, skills, and experience to monitor and evaluate the impact, effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, and sustainability of state policies, programs, and budgets in order to identify errors, unintended side-effects, and continuously improve the child protection and family strengthening system. The initial intention of the research was to use official data on the effectiveness of state social assistance and services programs and national policies, but the data were not available and therefore the existing analyses carried out by UNICEF's national and international experts have been used.

The data collected and published by the government agencies on the status of children in state-run residential care institutions are not complete and many indicators are not measured. For example, there are no studies of the reasons for abandoning newly-born children, the number of children reunified with their biological families, differentiation between children who stay in residential care for the short or long period of time, etc. The lack of data made it difficult for me to track the government's progress towards the goals of promoting family re-unification and preventing separation of children from their biological families.

The positive trend revealed during the research process is the availability of information on the work of state agencies on-line, within the recently initiated by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan "electronic government" project. Being far from

my native country, I had an opportunity to download national legislation, strategies, programs, action plans, official data and reports so as to further understand the current situation of children and families at risk of separation and to assess the progress made so far in the reform of child protection and family strengthening system in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

4.2 Establishment of the Need for the Current Study Based on the Findings of Previous Research

The main findings of previous research are presented in the introduction and the following chapters of the current study. In order to provide an in-depth review and analysis of the latest statistics on children in state-run residential care institutions I used the official statistical data and government reports. Also, the following assessments carried out by national and international experts were used in the first chapter: *Situation Analysis on Young People Ageing out of Care in the Republic of Kazakhstan* (Khairullina 2010); *Research on the Problems of Young People Ageing Out of Care and Ways of Their Solution* (Kameda Research and Consulting Center 2011); and *Violence against Children in State-Run Residential Institutions in Kazakhstan* (Haarr 2011). The analysis of the current situation of children and families at risk of separation in the Republic of Kazakhstan was mostly based on the following UNICEF reports: *At Home or in a Home? Formal Care and Adoption of Children in Eastern Europe and Central Asia* (UNICEF 2010); *Child Well-Being in Kazakhstan* (Roelen and Gassmann 2012); *System of Social Protection of Children in the Republic of Kazakhstan* (Children's Legal Center 2012); and *Status and Perspectives of the Social Services System Development in the Republic of*

Kazakhstan: Sphere of Social Protection of Children in Difficult Life Situations

(Nurkatova and Sudakova 2007). Besides, the scholarly journal article of Bulekbayeva Sholpan, MD, Chairperson of the Executive Board of JSC “Republican Children’s Rehabilitation Center,” was used to provide an overview of the status of children with disabilities (2011). Oxford Policy Management carried out the most intensive study to date of the capacity of child care and social protection systems in Ukraine, Albania, and Kazakhstan. Based on this study, as well as the official statistical data, strategic plans, legislative documents, and reports I could examine how effectively the existing family strengthening system functions in the country. Out of numerous internationally recognized tools, standards, methods, and technologies of work with vulnerable groups of children and families that I analyzed during the research process, the approach developed by SOS Children’s Villages International in work with biological families was found to be the most relevant for Kazakhstan, in particular, for newly-established Family Support Centers due to similar areas of work, target groups, and multiple socio-economic challenges that children and families of those target groups face and are unable to overcome.

There is no comprehensive study carried out to date in Kazakhstan that fully covers my area of investigation. The previous research on this subject is either narrowly focused or too broad. In order to achieve the research objectives, I had to make an in-depth analysis with subsequent synthesis of relevant information from a variety of sources. Many UNICEF and other international organizations’ studies were carried out at the regional level as comparative analysis aimed to highlight some common themes and to provide comparisons between the countries of interest or with regard to other countries

in the region. In order to properly understand and analyze the findings of these studies and to be able to distinguish relevant information from that which is absolutely not applicable to Kazakhstan, I used my knowledge, experience, and expertise gained over a long period of work in the sphere of child protection and family strengthening. My intention during the research process was to produce a comprehensive report using specific, relevant, and documented empirical evidence that substantiates the necessity for reforming the child protection and family strengthening system in the Republic of Kazakhstan so as it would be capable to adequately support the most vulnerable children and their families as well as to prevent family separation. As I know the representatives of many NGOs and international organizations dealing with child protection and family strengthening issues in Kazakhstan and have a strong network of significant government contacts, I am planning to submit the results of the research to these organizations as a reference document for evidence-based policy-making and use its findings in my future work.

CHAPTER 5

SITUATION ANALYSIS: CHILDREN AND FAMILIES AT RISK OF SEPARATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

5.1 Poverty Is Not the Only Cause of Separation, but an Important One

In *Child Well-Being in Kazakhstan* report, Keetie Roelen and Franziska Gassmann (2012:23) revealed that 45 percent of children under the age of 18 live in poverty, 7 percent of children live in extreme poverty - in families with consumption below 60 percent of the minimum subsistence level. Overall, poverty rates are slightly higher for children under the age of five than for older children. Families living in rural areas have a higher risk of living in poverty and the difference between urban and rural areas is even more pronounced for extreme poverty. Poverty is mostly experienced by families having many children, families living in rural areas, young families with children, single-parent and migrant families.

It is common to link the risk of children's separation from their families with a single factor, in particular, poverty. However, according to a UNICEF report *At Home or in a Home? Formal Care and Adoption of Children in Eastern Europe and Central Asia* (2010:17), poverty alone does not necessarily lead to a family break down, and not all poor families are at risk of separation. There are multiple psycho-social, socio-cultural, medical, economic, and political factors that decrease coping mechanisms of many families. Inadequate housing and living conditions, inability to pay for rent and utilities, unemployment, malnutrition, illness, lack of required documents, poor access to social infrastructure, and insufficient child care arrangements combine to break up families, robbing both parents and children of their dignity, their basic rights, and hopes for a

decent future. Inadequate state resources and the lack of a strong community increase the vulnerability of families. Devastated by stressful life circumstances, family members often turn to alcohol or drug abuse to escape from their daily realities, which also increases cases of domestic violence and negatively affects children's well-being. In addition, modernization of social relations has inevitably contributed to the changing of the family structure patterns, divorces, and an increasing number of teenage or unmarried mothers who abandon newly-born children, as they believe that they will be viewed negatively by relatives and the public for giving birth to a child out of wedlock. The latter is particularly true of women who migrated to Kazakhstan from conservative neighboring countries or who migrated to cities from rural areas. Often, families abandon newly-born children and infants being unable to withstand the pressures associated with costly infant care and loss of earnings of one parent (Oxford Policy Management 2011:13). But many of them believe that later on, when they improve their life conditions, they can be reunified with their children. According to the *Report to the President on Status of Children in the Republic of Kazakhstan* (Committee on Child Protection 2012:39), more than 80 percent of institutionalized children in Kazakhstan are children whose parents are alive and known by the authorities, but who have been deprived of their parental rights.

Overall, there is a small proportion of children who require the protection of the state – from abuse, exploitation, violence, and neglect - and who cannot be looked after by their own parents. More often, the removal of children from parents by the state and placement into formal care happens due to multiple socio-economic challenges that impoverished families face and are unable to overcome (Oxford Policy Management 2011:14, 16).

5.2 *“On discovering that their child has a disability, eight out of nine mothers will give them up to a residential care institution...” (Malone and Sturges 2011:4).*

According to official data, there are 151,216 children with disabilities living in the Republic of Kazakhstan (Committee on Child Protection 2012:16). They have delayed physical and mental development and are in need of specialized social services. In spite of the fact that children with disabilities amount to 3 percent of the total number of children (4,935,425 as of January 1, 2012), the majority of them are socially excluded and invisible due to the fact that public attitudes are intolerant and discriminatory toward this category of children, and as a whole to persons with disabilities. Despite government efforts to facilitate life for children with disabilities, there are still barriers to them leading full lives in the community. For instance, public transportation, residential houses, office buildings, pavements, subways, and public toilets are not adapted for the needs of persons with disabilities, and there are not enough traffic lights emitting sounds to indicate when it is safe to cross for those who are sightless. Social protection of persons with disabilities is limited by issuance of social benefits and privileges (Bulekbayeva 2011). Only 56.2 percent of children registered as living with disabilities have access to special education programs, even though the Law on Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities guarantees free access to primary, basic secondary and general secondary education (Committee on Child Protection 2012:16). There is a lack in production of devices that assist people and help them adapt to disabling conditions. Few NGOs advocate for the rights and interests of persons with disabilities being actively involved in the law-making and policy development process (Bulekbayeva 2011). The Ministry of Labor and Social Protection has just recently started to establish day care

centers around the country. “On discovering that their child has a disability, eight out of nine mothers will give them up to a residential care institution ...” (Malone and Sturges 2011:4). Usually, these children are abandoned and placed into the state-run residential care institutions because their parents consider themselves incapable of providing adequate care for them. Institutionalization may be related to the following: parents’ individual beliefs, the stigma associated with having a child with disability, lack of knowledge or training, material support or a shortage of specialized social services that support parents of special needs children at home such as respite care, special education programs, medical services, and counseling. Often, state agencies encourage parents to abandon the category of children who may be most vulnerable.

5.3 Legacy of the Pre-1991 Soviet Model of Over-reliance on Children’s Institutionalization

In spite of the fact that the country declared independence from the Soviet Union 20 years ago, the child protection and family strengthening system is still largely based on the pre-1991 Soviet model. It relies heavily on institutionalization of children and has an underdeveloped system of social services, which does not meet the pressing needs of children and families. For example, families in crisis are usually encouraged to abandon their children, as it is perceived by the state agencies as a reasonable and “easy” solution to difficult life situations the families face (Children’s Legal Center 2012:3). Often, children are placed into state-run residential care institutions for the wrong reasons. Later on, it becomes almost impossible for them to leave public care. They are transferred from

one institution to another and the impact of institutionalization on physical, emotional, and cognitive development of children is irreversible.

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Hodgkin and Newell 2002:281), family upbringing is important for children and the family environment is the preferred setting for children's survival, psychological, mental, spiritual, moral, and social development. The family setting prepares them for individual life in a society. Children should be placed outside their family only when it is in the best interests of children and for the shortest period possible. If the child is separated from their parents then he/she has the right to maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents on a regular basis, except when it is contrary to the child's best interests. When care by the child's own parents is unavailable or inappropriate, care by relatives of the child's parents, by another substitute – foster or adoptive – family or, if necessary, by an appropriate institution should be considered. This suggests a hierarchy of child care options: first, family relatives; second, substitute family through fostering or adoption; and third, an appropriate institution. Current child protection practices in Kazakhstan contradict the hierarchy of options. Residential care remains the primary option even as, alternative family-based care is growing (adoption, foster and kinship care). As during the Soviet era, the national model of social support for children in difficult life situations is built around the network of state-run residential care institutions, and the deprivation of parental rights is still a standard practice. The institutions receive significant financial resources and the support of legislation, traditional administrative and financial systems.

5.4 Inefficiency of the Family Strengthening and Child Protection System

Five ministries are responsible for child protection at the central government level, including the following: the Ministry of Education and Science and its Committee on Child Protection, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, and the Ministry of Justice. In addition, the Inter-ministerial Commission on Juvenile Affairs and Protection of Their Rights, composed of experts from the above-named ministries, ensures monitoring and control over the implementation process of child protection policies. Legislation empowers all of these government agencies to protect children's rights, but none of the agencies has clear responsibility to ensure that children are protected from abuse, violence, and exploitation. None of the agencies are mandated to address the risk factors in the lives of children and their families. There is no unified record of children and families in difficult life situations. The data are usually discrepant among the ministries because each ministry maintains its own record on the categories of children for which it is responsible, using different classifications, terminology, formats, and forms of data representation. It results in the system's failure to effectively meet their needs.

The review of the present system indicates that family strengthening and child protection services in Kazakhstan are fragmented across a number of bodies and tend to be passive rather than pro-active in nature. There are no services for emergency social assistance and early detection of children and families in difficult life situations. The five agencies wait for children and families at-risk to present themselves rather than identify them, provide them with essential services, and prevent children from losing parental care. There is a lack of compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

and current understandings of good practice. Due to an inadequate legal framework within which the child protection and family strengthening system operates, there are problems relating to the absence of coordination of the interdepartmental efforts and their interactions at the national and local levels.

5.5 Early Stages of Development of Social Services System in Kazakhstan

The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Special Social Services was adopted on December 29, 2008. It regulates public relations, arising in special social services delivery for individuals and families in difficult life situations. During the four years of its implementation many families and children at risk were provided with specialized social services. However, there are still many defects and shortcomings. Shortcomings exist in the following: in the implementation process at the stages of the beneficiaries' identification, in needs assessment, in referrals to other service-providers, in monitoring progress, and in quality assurance.

One of the main problems is the lack of qualified social workers because this profession has only recently been introduced in Kazakhstan and the notion of social services is quite new to the country. The available social work training is largely theoretical and does not prepare students adequately for the realities of the job. Many of them struggle to work effectively with marginalized and stigmatized groups, especially with disabled children. Tools that social workers need to do their job effectively, such as emergency social assistance or access to housing to respond to family crisis, have not yet been well established. In general, social work is considered to be one of the most stressful, overworked, and underpaid jobs, not only in Kazakhstan but all over the world.

This is why many graduates do not necessarily continue their career in the field of social work, and the country experiences an acute need in specialist social work personnel.

According to Nurkatova L.T. and Sudakova G.G., UNICEF national consultants, the spectrum and quality of social services rendered to vulnerable children by official bodies are now at a considerably lower level than is necessary. As the nonprofit sector is marginally represented in the system of social protection, the range of social services and its availability for children and families in need are limited. The family and child support services piloted by non-governmental organizations have yet to be scaled up and integrated into the administrative and funding of service delivery systems in Kazakhstan. The low quality of social services stems from both the absence of a unified record of children in difficult life situations and uniform state standards on social services for the given category of the population (2007:219-222). At present time, the government is developing national standards for special social services. Some of the standards have already been elaborated, but it is difficult to monitor the effectiveness of their implementation as their structure lacks the following key elements: a statement on the required level of quality; tasks, duties, and defined areas of authority for all stakeholders involved in the process; and implementation guidelines. The standards require redesign and further improvement as they simply list the main types of special social services without a clear interpretation.

There are social services that have been traditionally rendered to orphans, children deprived of parental care, children with deviant behavior, and children with disabilities within the state-run residential care institutions. However, there are insufficient family and child support services that divert children from entry into public care, strengthen the

resilience of socially vulnerable families or improve their ability to cope with stressful life circumstances. Several factors contribute to separation of children with their families: over-reliance on residential care, underdeveloped system of child and family support services, legislation which makes children from vulnerable families eligible for placement, lack of effective gatekeeping mechanisms, early identification of socially vulnerable families, and timely interventions.

CHAPTER 6

EVALUATION OF THE CAPACITY OF THE FAMILY STRENGTHENING SYSTEM TO PROVIDE ADEQUATE SUPPORT TO THE MOST VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES AND PREVENT FAMILY SEPARATION

One indicator of the effectiveness of the family strengthening system is its capacity to support vulnerable families in caring for their children at home. As it was mentioned in the *Introduction*, the number and rate of children separated from their biological families or placed into state-run residential care institutions is very high in Kazakhstan. Out of more than 10 thousand children residing in state-run residential care institutions, more than 80 percent are children whose parents are alive and known to the authorities, but who have been deprived of their parental rights (Committee on Child Protection 2012:39). This suggests the existing family strengthening system is failing to give vulnerable families the support they need to prevent the kinds of crises that lead to a child being placed in alternative care. The Republic of Kazakhstan operates social assistance programs and is in the process of establishing social services. In order to understand the persistent high rate of child placement in formal care, the weaknesses and challenges of the family strengthening system, as well as the barriers to accessing social assistance and services by children and families in Kazakhstan will be explored.

Overall, this chapter is divided into four sections: social transfers, social services, policies, and legislation. Initially, I describe the legislation, policy documents, family and child support services, and social transfers that currently exist in the country. Then, I analyze the weaknesses and challenges faced by the family strengthening system, in addition to the barriers to accessing social assistance and services by children and

families. In Chapter 8, *Conclusions and Recommendations*, I offer the possible ways of strengthening the impact of and access to the existing family strengthening system so that it can prevent the loss of parental care more effectively.

6.1 Social Transfers

6.1.1 Types of social transfers.

In accordance with the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan as of 16 June 1997 # 126 on State Social Benefits at Old Age, in Case of Disability, or Loss of a Breadwinner, persons with disabilities have a right to the monthly benefit, the amount of which is expressed in MSL¹ and depends on degree, type, and conditions causing the disability. Also, according to this law, in the case of the loss of the family breadwinner, his dependents (children under the age of 18 years old, retired parents, unemployed spouses who are taking care of small children) have a right to the benefit in the amount of 0.66 – 1.61 MSL / 12,316 – 30,043 KZT / 82 – 199 USD². If the breadwinner was a member of the State Social Insurance Fund and paid contributions, then the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan as of 25 April 2003 # 405-II on Mandatory Social Insurance is applied.

In accordance with the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan as of 5 April 1999 # 365 on Special State Benefit, this benefit is awarded regardless of other types of benefits

¹ Minimum Subsistence Level as of January 1, 2013 is 18,660 KZT / 124 USD. “Data on Minimum Salary Level, Minimum Calculation Index, and Minimum Subsistence Level for 1995 – 2013.” *Paragraph WWW Information Systems*. Retrieved May 18, 2013 http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=1026672.

² Exchange rate as of May 18, 2013 is 1 USD = 150.68 KZT. “Currency Exchange Rates.” *Kazkommertsbank*. Retrieved May 18, 2013 <http://en.kkb.kz/>.

a person currently receives. It is expressed in MCI³ and paid on a monthly basis to the following categories of population: people and children with disabilities (0.6 – 1.4 MCI / 1,039 – 2,423 KZT / 7 – 16 USD), mothers of large families (6 MCI / 10,386 KZT / 67 USD), and families with four or more children under 18 years of age (3.9 MCI / 6,751 KZT / 45 USD).

In accordance with the Government Decree as of 17 May 2000 # 738 on Social Assistance for Individuals in Need During the Period of Their Study, children from families eligible for Targeted Social Assistance (TSA), from large families, living in foster families or under guardianship and tutelage while studying at secondary school have a right for free hot meals, school and sports uniforms, and textbooks.

In accordance with the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan as of 24 December 2001 # 1685 on State Targeted Social Assistance, individuals with income below the poverty level are eligible for TSA. Monthly TSA amount is defined by the authorized agency as a difference between average income per capita and poverty level.

Also, according to the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan as of 25 April 2003 # 405-II on Mandatory Social Insurance, female members of the State Social Insurance Fund are eligible for the social payment in the event of a loss of income due to pregnancy and childbirth, or adoption of a newborn child. The social payment is awarded for the entire period of maternity leave and calculated by multiplying the average annual wage by the number of maternity leave months. Female members of the State Social Insurance Fund who are caring for a child under one year of age and experience a loss of

³ Minimum Calculation Index as of January 1, 2013 is 1,731 KZT / 11.5 USD. “Data on Minimum Salary Level, Minimum Calculation Index, and Minimum Subsistence Level for 1995 – 2013.” *Paragraph WWW Information Systems*. Retrieved May 18, 2013 http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=1026672.

income are also eligible for the social payment estimated at 40 percent of the average wage for the last two years.

In accordance with the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan as of 28 June 2005 # 63 on State Benefits for Families with Children, families having borne, adopted, or under guardianship and tutelage children, have a right to one-time child birth benefit (30-50 MCI / 51,930 – 86,550 KZT / 345 - 574 USD) and monthly benefit for families with a child under one year of age (5.5 – 8.5 MCI / 9,520.5 – 14,713.5 KZT / 63 – 98 USD). The amount is fixed and expressed in MCI. The amount of the benefit varies depending on whether the child is the first, second, third, fourth, etc. In addition, families with children under 18 years of age and income below the minimum subsistence level have a right for monthly child benefit (1 MCI per 1 child / 1,731 KZT / 11.5 USD). Families with a disabled child are eligible for a monthly benefit that equals to the minimum wage⁴.

Lastly, but of equal importance is the availability of housing assistance for low-income families. According to the Government Decree as of 30 December 2009 # 2314 on the Approval of Rules for Granting Housing Assistance, these funds cover the payment of rent and utilities if the actual costs exceed a certain percentage of total household income.

Overall, the development of the system of social assistance to families significantly improved the demographic situation and increased the birth rate in the country. Specifically, in 2003 there were 248,000 children born, comparatively in 2012,

⁴ Minimum wage as of January 1, 2013 is 18,660 KZT / 124 USD. “Data on Minimum Salary Level, Minimum Calculation Index, and Minimum Subsistence Level for 1995 – 2013.” *Paragraph WWW Information Systems*. Retrieved May 18, 2013 http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=1026672.

the number of births increased 1.5 times (379,000 children) (The Agency of Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2013a).

6.1.2 Identified problems.

According to official data, 3.8 percent (638,635) (The Agency of Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2013b) of the population in Kazakhstan has income below the minimum subsistence level. The TSA program intended to alleviate poverty by bringing the household as a whole up to a minimum, administratively-set, income level reaching only 15 percent (97,280) (The Agency of Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2013c) of the poorest households. Additionally, the average TSA amount is too low to sufficiently lift people out of long-term poverty and to make lasting changes to family circumstances. In 2012, countrywide, it amounted only to 1,503.6 KZT / 10 USD. Regardless of the level of subsistence, the process is difficult, overly-bureaucratized and burdensome for already burdened families.

In order to apply and prove eligibility for social assistance, families have to spend a considerable amount of time and money gathering and photocopying necessary documents. Usually, they are unsure where to go, who to ask, or what types of documents need to be submitted. The application process is even more challenging for families from rural areas because applications for benefits cannot be filed in a village, necessitating costly travel to district or regional centers.

Often, families in need are unaware of the types of social assistance they are eligible for, the application procedures, and the monetary amounts of the state benefits for which they qualify. Typically, this information is available on the government web-

sites but it is accessible only to those with internet capabilities. Needy families from rural areas are even less informed because of where they live in relation to the urban location of social assistance and social services offices where further information can be obtained (Oxford Policy Management 2011:34). Families in need often express their confusion and frustration regarding inconsistencies in monthly payments and different amounts that vary from one geographical area to another (Ainsworth 2012:4).

In addition, there are some restrictions built into the design of the social assistance system that create barriers to accessing state benefits for the families at-risk. For example, families must have resident registration to be eligible for state benefits. As there is high internal migration in Kazakhstan from rural to urban areas and from small towns to big cities, this barrier is particularly challenging. Migrant families have to return to the place where they are registered in order to gather documents necessary for the application process, or are only permitted to receive state benefits in the place where they are registered (Oxford Policy Management 2011:31). Also, income calculations for means-tested social transfers sometimes include benefits received through other schemes. For example, a poor family that receives a one-time child birth benefit may no longer be eligible for TSA (Ainsworth 2012:4).

Administrators of social assistance programs often have negative attitudes, stigmatizing and discriminating against poor families or families with a child with disabilities. This fact usually prevents them from pursuing benefits, which are already difficult to access (Oxford Policy Management 2011:36).

Although, there are many types of social transfers available to children and families in Kazakhstan that have positive impact and help to meet some of their needs, it

is clear that vulnerable groups of children and families face a range of barriers and cannot access them due to the problems identified above that are in urgent need of government's attention.

6.2 Child and Family Support Social Services

6.2.1 Types of social services.

In 2002, the “Hope” group was established in infants' homes in every region of Kazakhstan with the goal of preventing abandonment and institutionalization of newly-born children. According to the Infants' Home Regulations as of June 6, 2000, the capacity of the group is limited to 13 children. Also, the admission criteria are strict: the child must be born out-of-wedlock, physically and mentally healthy, and the mother must be a young, unmarried woman giving birth for the first time. Also, the newly-born children whose mothers are convicted and serve short-term prison sentences may be admitted to the group. The child is placed into the “Hope” group for the period of no more than three years. The mother may stay in the group together with her child, or she may leave her child in the group while trying to improve her own life conditions by finding a job and a stable income, permanent housing, and securing the child's father's or relatives' support. After setting up a stable home, the mother is obliged to take her child from the infants' home (2002:5, 7-12).

One of the recent positive trends in work of maternity wards is the establishment of psychological, legal and social services for pregnant women and women in childbirth. The staff rendering these services are focused on supporting newly-born children from vulnerable families and preventing them being placed in residential care.

On March 3, 2012, the Ministry of Education and Science decided to establish Family Support Centers, and by the end of last year 58 centers have been already functioning in the country. The centers have stable funding from the republican and regional budgets. The centers provide psychological, legal, and pedagogical counseling for potential and current foster, adoptive parents, and guardians. Also, the centers promote alternative forms of family-based care by publishing printed educational materials, placing articles in newspapers and magazines, and broadcasting social videos on national TV channels. Although it is too early to evaluate their effectiveness, according to the reports of the Committee on Child Protection (2013), the centers are more concentrated on reunifying children from institutions with their biological families and providing them with alternative forms of family-based care rather than supporting vulnerable families, reducing the flow of children into residential care.

According to the Decree of the Minister of Education and Science as of 13 July 2009 # 338 on Approval of Standard Job Descriptions of Teaching Staff, every pre-, primary, secondary, and vocational school in Kazakhstan must have in its staff a pedagogue-psychologist and a social pedagogue. A pedagogue-psychologist renders correctional, rehabilitative support, and provides individual and group psychological counseling for children and their families (2009:31, 66-68). A social pedagogue assesses the needs of children, develops and implements the individual development plans, monitors the progress, connects children with the state and/or community resources, and coordinates the delivery of essential services provided by other resources in order to accomplish the objectives specified in the plans. A social pedagogue provides guidance

on accessing state social services and assistance for vulnerable children and their families (2009:74-76).

There are also some NGOs that provide psychological, social, legal, economic, and other types of services for children and families in difficult life situations. Unfortunately, these projects usually are not sustainable and depend on the grants of national and international foundations.

6.2.2 Identified problems.

In spite of the fact that the country has extensive social assistance system in place, it has only begun to develop the system of social services. The main problems and shortcomings of the system of social services and the entire family strengthening and child protection system have been fully explored in Chapter 5.

Many families in the country neither access social services nor understand their purpose. “In Kazakhstan, parents and care givers found it difficult to discuss services, and reflected little understanding of what they are, how they can help, and where to find them” (Oxford Policy Management 2011:33). Also, the decision-makers at the central and local level are unaware of social services and the role they can play in child and family support. Usually, they associate “social work” solely with home-based care and assistance with activities of daily living for elderly or disabled people (Oxford Policy Management 2011:28).

6.3 Policies

At present time, there is only one operating program for social protection of children, women, and families. The policy falls under the Ministry of Labor and Social

Protection of the Republic of Kazakhstan's Strategic Plan for 2011-2015 (2011:2-15).

The plan has different strategies and courses of action that lead to the achievement of the following ministry's goals: protection of labor rights, promotion of productive employment, and higher living standards. This study is focused only on those components of the plan that relate to social protection of children and families.

In order to enhance the well-being of the nation and alleviate poverty the ministry intends to increase the amount of state social benefits and to extend the reach of social assistance to the most vulnerable and deprived categories of the population. With the view of creating an effective system of social support for vulnerable groups, the ministry plans by 2017 to continue reforming the social services system by introducing state-guaranteed social services, de-monopolizing the social services market, applying national standards on provision of special social services, and developing a social services infrastructure. On December 11, 2008, the Republic of Kazakhstan ratified and signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol. In order to enforce the Convention and monitor its implementation, the ministry aligns its Strategic Plan with the spirit and stipulations of the Convention and gives special attention to removing the barriers that impede the realization of the rights of persons with disabilities and hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

For a long time, the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection has been responsible only for implementation of social assistance programs and providing social services to children with disabilities. Responsibility for providing social services for other vulnerable categories of children and their families is shared among the other four ministries. Each

of these ministries implements policy within its area of responsibility, providing universally available services (education, health ...) for children. The main problem is that there is no clear national policy in place explicitly aiming to provide adequate support to the most vulnerable children and their families and prevent family breakdown. There is an acute need for ministries to work together and to build synergies between apparently unrelated policies within the child protection and family strengthening system. The risks of not ensuring a strong inter-sectoral approach to reforming the system of family and child social support, led from the top, can leave some ministries behind in reform thinking and can undermine progress (Oxford Policy Management 2011:42).

6.4 Legislation

Key legislative documents, which guarantee social protection for children and families at-risk, regulate the process of delivery of social services and assistance, and support children to be cared for in their own families have been already listed and explained. Kazakhstan has established the legislative framework that is sufficient for developing a comprehensive child protection and family strengthening system. But, there are no clear guidelines for implementation of these laws.

As mentioned in Chapter 5, many national standards on the provision of social services are still being developed. As for those that are already established, it is difficult to monitor the effectiveness of their implementation because their structure lacks the following key elements: a statement on the required level of quality; tasks, duties, and defined areas of authority for all stakeholders involved in the process; and explicit implementation guidelines. The standards require redesign and further improvement as

they simply list the main types of special social services without a clear interpretation and application. The government should develop comprehensive secondary legislation so that the administrators would be able to effectively plan, finance, and deliver social assistance and services for children and families. Secondary legislation is a powerful instrument through which, based on the feedback of beneficiaries, it becomes possible to improve the legislation and the entire child protection and family strengthening system without having to pass a new law.

CHAPTER 7

REVIEW OF THE NATIONAL STANDARD # 526 AS OF 18 NOVEMBER 2009 ON PROVISION OF SPECIAL SOCIAL SERVICES IN THE SPHERE OF EDUCATION

This chapter is divided into two main sections. The set of recommendations on the general structure and key elements of the National Standard are provided in the first section. The examples of international best practices that appear to have proven successful and may be applied in Kazakhstan are offered in the second section of the chapter.

7.1 Recommendations on the General Structure and Key Elements of the National Standard

The National Standard # 526 as of 18 November 2009 on Provision of Special Social Services in the Sphere of Education is elaborated in accordance with the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Special Social Services. It applies to state-run residential care institutions and other organizations providing social services in the sphere of education for the following categories of children in difficult life situations: orphans and children deprived of parental care, children with disabilities, children with deviant behavior, and neglected children. In addition, it establishes the main types, scope, and terms of provision of social services for the families at-risk (See Appendix).

During the consideration of this standard, it becomes obvious that the standard is more focused on further development of the state-run residential care and alternative forms of family-based care, rather than of the child and family support social services. Among alternative forms of family-based care, only foster and adoptive families are

indicated. The standard lacks such forms of family-based care as guardianship, tutelage, and kinship care. There is an extensive list of organizations working with disabled children. Only two organizations, Family and Child Support Centers, child abuse and neglect prevention programs, provide social services for other categories of children and families in difficult life situations. The list of services does not address all the problems that vulnerable groups of children and families encounter in their lives.

Regarding the general structure of the national standard, it requires thorough revision, as the standard simply lists the main types of special social services for beneficiaries without a clear interpretation of who is eligible and how to apply the services. In accordance with the generally accepted structure, the standards should be divided into several standard areas as per different categories of beneficiaries or different stages of the process. For example, the process may consist of the following coherent stages: admission, assessment of the needs of children and their families, family development planning, service delivery, review of the progress, and exit. Each standard area should include an extensive list of standards. The standard itself should have a title, brief description, and clear statement regarding the required level of quality. Also, each standard should clearly define the tasks, duties, and areas of authority for all stakeholders involved in the implementation process and provide clear implementation guidelines and requirements. Only in the presence of these key elements will the National Standard and the Law on Special Social Services be fully implemented and operationalized.

7.2 Internationally Recognized Methods and Technologies of Work with Children and Families

In the current section, I illustrate examples of internationally recognized methods and technologies of work with the most vulnerable children and their families that may enhance the list of services provided in the standard.

7.2.1 Types of social services for families with children with disabilities.

Many services are provided for children with disabilities in state-run residential care institutions or in hospitals and have a heavy medical focus. Education services, even though the legislation guarantees free access to primary and secondary school education, are still not a reality for many children with disabilities. Usually, they are taught under home programs that are heavily reliant on the child's family providing support or in institutions. Out of 151,216 children with disabilities living in Kazakhstan, only about 3,000 attend kindergartens and 9,000 attend secondary schools within recently established system of an inclusive education (Committee on Child Protection 2012:32). There is a considerable gap in provision of a continuum of social services for children with special needs at the community level, especially in rural areas, that contributes to high rates of their institutionalization. As a minimum, the following types of social services need to be developed in a way that makes them accessible to all children with disabilities who need them:

Early Childhood Intervention Programs are for children under the age of three, with diagnosed disabilities, developmental delays, or substantial risk of significant delays. These are multi-disciplinary services focused on early childhood growth and

development, supporting families to understand the special needs of the child, to acquire the skills to maximize the child's abilities and progressive development during the critical early years. They include: assisting technological devices and services, audiology, occupational and physical therapy, medical, nursing, nutrition, and psychological services, special instruction, etc. The services may be provided within a center-based, a home-based, or a mixed program (Bright Tots).

Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) Programs focus on enhancing the quality of life for children with disabilities and their families, meeting basic needs, and ensure rehabilitation, equalization of opportunities, social inclusion and participation. CBR programs are implemented "...through the combined efforts of persons with disabilities themselves, their families, organizations and communities, and the relevant governmental and non-governmental health, education, vocational, social and other services" (World Health Organization 2010:30). These are multi-disciplinary outreach services focused on building parenting skills tailored to the child's individual special needs, adapting the child's physical environment, providing adaptive technical aids to enhance child mobility, communication, social inclusion, and participation. The specific activities for children with disabilities and their families within CBR programs may include: health and education services, as well as livelihood, social, and empowerment components.

Respite Care Services provide parents with short-term child care services, offering temporary relief, improving family stability, and reducing the risk of child abuse or neglect (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services). These kinds of services have proven to be especially valuable for improving the quality of life of families with children who require intense levels of day care.

7.2.2 Core approach of SOS Children's Villages International in work with biological families.

The core approach in work with biological families developed by SOS Children's Villages International for its Family Strengthening Projects (FSP) may be applied by Family Support Centers in Kazakhstan due to similar areas of work, target groups, and multiple socio-economic challenges that children and families of those target groups face and are unable to overcome. The main goal of FSPs is to prevent family breakdowns and to enable families to achieve self-reliance in providing care and protection for their children (2012:3). The categories of children and families reached by FSPs differ depending on the risk factors defined in each specific country, including: pregnant single women or women with newborn children, children from families affected by drug and alcohol abuse, children who are or whose parents are affected by a disability or severe illness, children from large and/or single-parent families, children living with domestic violence, children from severely economically under-resourced households, etc. As for the target group, it is the same for all FSPs in Central and Eastern Europe, Commonwealth of Independent States, and the Baltic States, wherein "children who are at risk of losing parental care when their basic material, emotional, health, and educational needs are being neglected or when they are abused because their caregivers lack the capacity or commitment to adequately care for them" (2012:4). A case management approach is used to work with children and families with a caseworker assessing the needs of family, developing and implementing the plan, monitoring the family's progress, evaluating the family's self-reliance, and making decisions on the case closure (2012:8). Below is a list of social services provided by FSPs for children and

their families. The list is not exhaustive and can be modified depending on the needs of specific FSPs (2012:9-11):

Education Support which aims to increase the access of children to pre-school, school, and after-school activities (ex: linking families with relevant formal and informal educational service providers, providing financial assistance in the form of payments for textbooks, stationery, pre-school/school fees, and tutoring).

Health Support which aims to improve health condition of children and parents, and sustain it at an adequate level (ex: payment for medical examinations, treatments, medication, and vaccinations, providing disabled children and parents with adaptive technical aids).

Social Support includes clear guidance for parents on social benefit entitlements, eligibility criteria, and application procedures, informing parents of the social services available to them, and empowering them to exercise their rights from the government authorities.

Parenting Support aims to equip caregivers with knowledge and practical skills in order to empower them to provide quality care for their children and be able to adequately address children's needs (ex: parenting skills trainings, self-help groups).

Economic Support aims to assist parents in securing a more stable source of income (ex: organization and/or payment for vocational trainings/re-training courses, job hunting skills and income-generation trainings; providing micro-loans to poor families to start or expand small, self-sufficient businesses; purchase of special tools and equipment to secure employment/self-employment or start business).

Support in Improving Housing and/or Living Conditions which aims to ensure normal healthy living conditions for children (ex: payment for building materials and repair work, purchase of basic furniture, household, and hygienic items, temporary or partial cash support for payment of rent or accumulated debts for utilities).

Nutrition Support which aims to ensure adequate nutrition for children and is rendered to the family in cases when children are found to be malnourished (ex: formula milk for newborns, food packages for children, training for parents on child nutrition and how to cook nourish and healthy meals for children using food products provided by FSPs).

Other types of support, such as new and second-hand seasonal clothing, legal aid, psychological counseling and trainings, are the same as listed in the National Standard.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Conclusions

The current research has highlighted several factors which lead to a family breakdown, loss of parental care, and an increasing rate of children's entry into state-run residential care in the Republic of Kazakhstan. According to the findings of the research, poor families - particularly those with many children living in remote rural areas, caring for a disabled child, and unmarried mothers with newly-born children - are at the highest risk of family separation. Overall, there is a small proportion of children who require the protection of the state – from abuse, exploitation, violence, and neglect - and who cannot be cared for by their own parents. More often, the removal of children from parents by the state and placement into formal care happens due to multiple socio-economic challenges that impoverished families face and are unable to overcome. Over-reliance on residential care, an underdeveloped system of child and family support services, legislation which makes children from vulnerable families eligible for placement, lack of effective gatekeeping mechanisms, early identification of socially vulnerable families, and timely interventions contribute to the separation of children from their families.

8.2 Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the major recommendations on reforming the child protection and family strengthening system in the Republic of Kazakhstan so that it is capable to adequately supporting the most vulnerable children and their families and to prevent family breakdown are as follows:

1. It is recommended that the government put an end to sending children into residential care, in order to decrease the number of orphans and children deprived of parental care residing in state-run residential care institutions and to protect their right to grow up in a family environment. The government should promote non-institutional care solutions and reform its entire system by moving away from over-reliance on residential care to developing different types of home-based care and support services for children and families at-risk.
2. It is recommended that recently established Family Support Centers strengthen gatekeeping mechanisms by diverting children from initial entry into residential care and provide timely effective support for their socially vulnerable families, in addition to their current activities of reunifying children deprived of parental care with their biological families and providing them with alternative forms of care. Efficient gate-keeping requires a core assessment of the child and family situation, planning, coordination, and delivery of specifically tailored social services, as well as monitoring, evaluation, and regular review of the decision-making process. The Family Support Centers, while widening the spectrum of their services, should avoid building a parallel system and duplicating efforts of other stakeholders. Instead, they should provide services to fill the gaps in the system, where no other provider with an acceptable service quality is available. Sharing expertise and resources within the service providing network will strengthen the system of social services, making it more comprehensive and result-oriented. Also, the synergy among a wider range of service-providers will

better address the complex and multi-dimensional problems faced by children and families at-risk, achieving a greater outcome for their lives.

3. It is recommended that the administrators extend the reach of programs by providing services and raising awareness of existing state benefits at the locations of those in need, especially in rural areas, in order to increase the coverage and strengthen the impact of social assistance programs. These outreach activities can be also carried out by local NGOs or service providers (schools, kindergartens, hospitals, out-patient clinics, etc.). The main goal is to provide at-risk families with access to state benefits, to inform them of application procedures, eligibility criteria, and benefit amounts, and to make these programs more transparent and user-friendly. Extending the reach of social assistance also includes eliminating the barriers the most vulnerable groups may face to receiving assistance and simplifying the application process. Social assistance should be delivered in ways that are empowering, respectful of rights, non-judgmental and non-discriminatory.
4. Given that the infrastructure for social assistance, education and health is more developed than for social services, it is recommended to build a social work system onto the existing infrastructure so as to extend the reach of social services to the most vulnerable and deprived children and their families. Also, it is necessary to facilitate the sharing of information and unify diverse data on children and families in difficult life situations among the ministries. This approach could have the added benefit of determining the best use of available resources and strengthening inter-agency coordination and collaboration at the national and local levels (Oxford Policy Management 2011:48).

5. Due to the fact that Kazakhstan currently experiences an acute need for specialist social work personnel, it is necessary for the government to prioritize increasing the number and improving the training of social workers, to build the capacities of teachers to deliver social work training, and to assist universities with the development of adequate for the realities of the job social work curriculum. Social work training must provide a mix of academic and practical work, spending part of the time working with children and families and part of the time in the university reflecting on and learning from experience (Children's Legal Center 2012:33).
6. It is recommended for the ministries to work together and to build synergies between apparently unrelated, existing, approved policies within the child protection and family strengthening system in order to take forward an agenda focused on preventing loss of parental care.
7. The government should develop comprehensive guidance on how to implement and enforce existing legislation by setting out clear tasks, duties, and defined areas of authority for all stakeholders involved in the process, quality requirements, and mechanisms for implementation of social assistance and services programs.

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APPENDIX

AN EXCERPT FROM THE NATIONAL STANDARD # 526 AS OF 18 NOVEMBER 2009 ON PROVISION OF SPECIAL SOCIAL SERVICES IN THE SPHERE OF EDUCATION

General Provisions

1. The standard is elaborated in accordance with the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Special Social Services.
2. The standard applies to organizations providing social services in the sphere of education for children in difficult life situations.
3. The standard establishes the main types, scope, and terms of provision of social services.

4. The list of organizations that provide social services:

State-run residential care institutions for:

- Orphans and children deprived of parental care;
- Children with deviant behavior;
- Children with disabilities.

Other organizations (this is not a comprehensive list):

- Family and Child Support Centers;
- Child abuse and neglect prevention programs and services.

For children with disabilities:

- Early Intervention Centers;
- Rehabilitation Centers;
- Psychological, Medical and Pedagogical Commissions (PMPC);
- Psychology and Special Education Counseling Centers;
- Preschools and schools for students who have special educational needs due to severe learning difficulties, physical disabilities, or behavioral problems;
- Inclusive schools, in which students with special needs study with non-disabled students.

- 3) Foster and adoptive families.

5. The categories of beneficiaries:

- Orphans and children deprived of parental care;
- Children with disabilities;
- Children with deviant behavior;
- Neglected children;
- Families at-risk.

6. The main types, scope, and terms of provision of social services:

Special social services are divided into the following categories:

- Personal care services;
- Health care services;
- Psychological services;
- Special education services;
- Economic support;
- Legal services.

The list of services for children and families at risk of separation:

Personal Care Services:

- Development of self-care skills and providing assistance for disabled children with a variety of activities related to the individual's care needs, such as dressing, grooming, bathing, toileting, etc.
- Providing new and second-hand seasonal clothing and shoes for children from low-income families.

Health Care Services:

- Assistance in obtaining medical services and guaranteed volume of free medical aid: medical-social examination, primary medical examination and treatment, emergency care, etc.
- Providing support in case of children's hospitalization.
- Improving health with wellness activities.
- Counseling services, training parents and family members to assist in the rehabilitation of their disabled children.

Psychological Services:

- Psychological diagnostic evaluations for making differential diagnosis of psychiatric conditions and comprehensive treatment plans.
- Different forms of individual and family psychotherapy ranging from working with individual adults, children, or adolescents to involving entire families, couples, or extended family members aimed to improve the psychological climate

in the family, build emotional stability between children and their parents, and strengthen their resilience and coping abilities when faced with challenging life situations.

- Psychological trainings for children and their families.
- Psychological consultations in different areas of expertise: learning disorders, stress, conflicts, difficulty engaging in peer interactions and relationships, etc.

Special Education Services:

- Pedagogical counseling services.
- Correctional educational programs for children who do not meet the minimal requirements for satisfactory academic progress.
- Teaching of children with special needs in a format that is accessible to them (extended time, simplified and/or shorter assignments, etc.).
- Providing access to education for children with special needs.
- Home-based education of children with special needs.

Economic Support:

- Providing families with guidance and assistance on accessing state social benefits and improving living conditions.
- Providing families with guidance and assistance to find and secure a more stable source of income (starting business, income generating activities).

Legal Services:

- Providing families with guidance and assistance on accessing state social services and empowering them to exercise their rights to aid from the government and other duty bearers.
- Providing families with assistance in collecting the documents needed to exercise their legal rights in courts and other authorities, as well as to secure registration documents (ID, birth/death/marriage/divorce certificates).
- Providing families with assistance in defending and exercising their legal rights and interests in courts.
- Providing assistance in initiating legal action against social services' providers that violate or infringe the legal rights of children and their parents.
- Providing assistance in bringing the perpetrators of child abuse to justice.
- Temporary placement of children in need of social rehabilitation into foster families, under guardianship, or tutelage.